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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000188

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DAKAR PASS RAO, DAO, AND ODC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOWING COUP
ATTEMPT

REF: A. BANJUL 184 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. BANJUL 178

[1](#)C. BANJUL 177

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) President Jammeh issued a predictably tough, defiant statement on the failed coup attempt, describing the plotters as "bed bugs and fleas" and warning that they would receive no leniency. He also indicated the GOTG's determination to host the AU Summit in July as scheduled -- "whether any country, body, or organization likes it or not." Two allied opposition parties have condemned the coup attempt, while expressing hope that the GOTG will refrain from a crackdown on the opposition. The number of detainees suspected of involvement in the plot has now reached 27, by our count, and we have registered concern to the GOTG over an Amcit detainee, Tamsir Jasseh, and requested prompt access to him. The extent of support for the coup outside the military remains unclear; we will look for an early opportunity to flag to the GOTG the need to avoid a crackdown on the opposition in reaction to the failed plot. END SUMMARY.

JAMMEH'S PUBLIC APPEARANCE AND STATEMENT

[1](#)2. (SBU) On March 24, President Jammeh made his first public appearance in Banjul since rushing back from Mauritania following the aborted coup attempt March 21 (ref a). Local journals ran photos of crowds cheering Jammeh, accompanied by a large contingent of aides and security officers, as he strolled along a Banjul thoroughfare.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On the evening of March 24, Jammeh issued his initial statement on the incident in a televised address (full text being sent to AF/W). It was a predictably tough statement from the rough-hewn President, who referred to the "cowardly plotters" as "bed bugs and fleas" and claimed that they had undertaken their "unpatriotic act for no reason other than sheer greed, inordinate and selfish desire for power and possible outside influence." (COMMENT: In March 25 conversation with Foreign Minister Lamin Kaba Bajo, Ambassador asked whether Jammeh was referring to a foreign power with his mention of "possible outside influence"; Bajo professed ignorance on this score, but reiterated, per ref b,

that he was not aware of any evidence of foreign involvement in the coup plot. END COMMENT.)

¶4. (SBU) Jammeh went on to suggest that the plotters, or sympathizers, may have been motivated by a desire to tarnish the country's image with an eye to the GOTG's scheduled hosting of the African Union Summit in July. He remarked, "The Gambia is hosting the AU summit in a few months time and some entities do not want to see that take place. They want to give the impression that we are not stable enough. They have failed and will always fail. By the grace of Allah, we will host the AU with success, whether any country, body, or organization likes it or not."

¶5. (SBU) Jammeh warned that those implicated in the overthrow attempt could expect no leniency. He stated, "...attempts to unconstitutionally overthrow it (Jammeh's Government) will be crushed without mercy. Gambians can be rest assured that, Allah willing, I will set an example that will put a definitive end to these ruthless, callous, and shameless acts of treachery and sabotage. I have warned Gambians long enough. This time you can be rest assured is not the time for sympathy. Enough of this nonsense."

STATEMENT BY THE OPPOSITION

¶6. (SBU) The opposition has also spoken out against the incident. In a March 26 statement as reported by the media, the representatives of the country's largest opposition party, United Democratic Party (UDP), and the allied National Reconciliation Party (NRP) issued a joint statement condemning "all forms of regime or government change by means of force or through the barrel of a gun." The two parties expressed "regret" over "the actions of certain members of the security force who attempted to resort to such action rather than encourage peaceful means of effecting regime change." The parties urged the GOTG to ensure "speedy and

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fair trial" for the accused, while also registering concern over the detention of civilians and expressing hope that the failed plot would not result in a "political vendetta and witchhunt for opponents within the system of partisan politics."

MORE DETENTIONS

¶7. (SBU) Meanwhile the number of persons picked up for suspected involvement in the plot continues to grow and has now reached twenty-seven, by our count. The majority of detainees are current or former military and security personnel; among the half-dozen or so civilians in custody is an Amcit (dual national), Tamsir Jasseh, former senior Interior Ministry official (Director General of Immigration) who, as reported ref c, initially informed us of the coup plot on the evening of March 21. Following GOTG's confirmation to us March 25 of Jasseh's detention, Ambassador spoke separately with the Interior Minister and Foreign Minister, noting our concern for his well-being and requesting that we be allowed to visit him at the earliest opportunity. The Ministers took note of our request and indicated that they would arrange for our access to Jasseh as promptly as possible. On March 27, we followed up with a diplomatic note requesting access. In conversation with pol/econoff, the director of the country's largest prison, "Mile Two" prison located near Banjul, confirmed that Jasseh was being held there; pol/econoff stressed Embassy's concern for Amcits' well-being.

¶8. (SBU) According to the local press, other civilian detainees include, inter alia, the Gambian Civil Aviation Authority's Security Manager, Lamin Gassama, a former National Assembly member, Ramzia Diab and her husband, Raif Diab, as well as a senior Finance Ministry official,

Accountant General Alieu Jobe. We are aware of one detainee being released so far, current Director General of Immigration, Musa Mboob, who was reportedly picked up March 26 and released later the same day.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) President Jammeh's statement on the failed coup attempt is consistent with his well-established penchant for engaging in tough, defiant, and convoluted rhetoric that is less than statesman-like. His logic in linking the coup attempt to efforts to thwart the GOTG's hosting of the upcoming AU summit is murky, and we will seek clarification from the GOTG. We will also seek clarification on his reference to "possible outside influence" in connection with the plot. Meanwhile, while Jammeh may take heart from the GOTG opposition parties' condemnation of the overthrow attempt, they made clear their concern over the specter of a crackdown on the opposition in the GOTG's reaction to the incident. As reported ref a, prominent local journalist Pap Saine indicated to us that he did not expect such a crackdown, but we will look for an early opportunity to raise the matter with the GOTG.

¶10. (C) The extent to which there was support for the coup attempt beyond the military remains unclear. However, at this point, the possibility of significant pro-coup sentiment among civilians -- at least among die-hard adversaries in The Gambia or abroad -- cannot be ruled out, although our assessment remains that the stability of The Gambia's government and society remains intact. END COMMENT.
STAFFORD